

# DEFINITION OF PLOT

Plot refers to \_\_\_\_\_ that give a story its \_\_\_\_\_ and effect. In most stories, these events arise out of **conflict** experienced by the \_\_\_\_\_. The conflict may come from something \_\_\_\_\_, like a dragon or an overbearing mother, or it may stem from an \_\_\_\_\_, such as jealousy, loss of \_\_\_\_\_, or overconfidence. As the \_\_\_\_\_ makes choices and tries to \_\_\_\_\_, the story's action is \_\_\_\_\_ and plot is generated. In some stories, the author structures the entire plot chronologically, with the \_\_\_\_\_ followed by the second, third, and so on, like beads on a string. However, many other stories are told with \_\_\_\_\_ techniques in which \_\_\_\_\_ events from earlier times interrupt the story's "current" events.

All stories are unique, and in one sense there are as many plots as there are stories. In one general view of plot, however—and one that describes many works of fiction—the story begins with \_\_\_\_\_ as the character experiences \_\_\_\_\_ through a series of plot \_\_\_\_\_ that entangle him or her more deeply in the \_\_\_\_\_. This conflict reaches a \_\_\_\_\_, after which the conflict is \_\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_\_\_ leads quickly to the story's \_\_\_\_\_. Things have generally changed at the end of a story, either in the \_\_\_\_\_ or the \_\_\_\_\_; \_\_\_\_\_ subsides, and a new status quo is achieved. It is often instructive to apply this three-part structure even to stories that don't \_\_\_\_\_.

**exposition:** the basic situation; the opening of the story, where the characters and their conflicts are usually introduced

**conflict:** The basic tension, predicament, struggle or challenge that propels a story's plot

**complications:** Plot events that plunge the protagonist further into conflict (ex. Danger, fear)

**rising action:** The part of a plot in which the drama intensifies, rising toward the climax

**climax:** The plot's most dramatic and revealing moment, usually the turning point of the story

**falling action:** The part of the plot after the climax, when the drama subsides and the conflict is resolved

**denouement:** (French word meaning “unraveling the knot”) The resolution occurring at the end of the story

# PLOT EXERCISE

Most plots develop because a character is in a situation involving conflict. The conflict might be a personal dilemma, a pressing desire, a threatening enemy, a burdensome duty, or the loss of something important. In most stories, a series of character choices leads ultimately to a resolution of the problem. Often the resolution comes about because the external situation is different (what was desired is acquired, the dragon is slain, and so on). Just as often, and especially in contemporary stories, something has changed internally in the character after the story's resolution. He or she has gained an insight, adopted a new philosophy, or come to terms with a negative emotion.

## INSTRUCTIONS

For this exercise, select one character and one situation from each COLUMN. For example, your match might be this: "A recently divorced mother of three who suddenly needs to go to Ireland."

### CHARACTERS:

A thirty-year-old female airplane mechanic

Working college student taking too many credits

Retired architect living in Mexico

An artist about to have his or her first gallery exhibit

Recently divorced mother of three

Aging hippie selling flowers at a busy intersection

Mayor of a small suburb

Twenty-year-old professional skateboarder

### SITUATIONS:

Learns about having a terminal illness

Wins the lottery

Suddenly wants to catch a fish for the first time

Begins to experience religious doubt

Needs to go to Ireland

Encounters an old enemy

Encounters an old romantic acquaintance

Is visited by three different annoying relatives all at once

Think of a basic plot outline using the character and situation you have selected. Based on this situation, what would happen first? What next? Indicate what kind of climax or resolution might occur in this plot. You may add additional characters to make the plot make sense.

Your plot outline is homework and will be collected tomorrow. Please use the plot outline handout to complete the story of your character and the situation.